

Message Text

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ACTION AF-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-06 ISO-00 EB-05 XMB-01 DRC-01 RSC-01 /020 W
----- 123682

R 221139Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5433

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

USDOC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 0611

USDOC FOR STEPHEN CONGER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, GB

SUBJ: TRANSGABON RAILROAD: CHOICE OF ENGINEERING CON-
SULTING FIRM

REF: (A) LIBREVILLE 0588 (BEING REPEATED BRUSSELS);

(B) PARIS 12365

1. AS MADE CLEAR IN REF (A), STATEMENT BY FARHI, VP LOUIS
BERGER IN PARIS (REF B) THAT HE "SURPRISED THAT US AMBASSADOR
TO GABON DID NOT EVEN INCLUDE LOUIS BERGER AMONG NAMES U.S.
FIRMS TO BE CONSIDERED" IS INCORRECT.

2. EMBASSY PUSHED HARD FOR TAMS AT TIME WHEN TAMS WAS
ONLY U.S. FIRM WHICH HAD EVINCED ANY INTEREST IN RAILROAD.
AS SOON AS INTEREST OF LOUIS BERGER BECAME KNOWN TO EMBASSY
THROUGH CALL ON AMBASSADOR BY LAROCHE IN LIBREVILLE,
EMBASSY VERY CAREFUL NOT TO RECOMMEND ONE FIRM OVER THE
OTHER. IN LETTER TO BONGO, AMBASSADOR VOUCHERED FOR
OUTSTANDING QUALIFICATIONS OF BOTH FIRMS.

3. ON SUBJECT OF TIMING, EMBASSY FEELS STRONGLY THAT
ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM (IF ONE IS TO BE CHOSEN)
SHOULD BE CHOSEN AT VERY LATEST IN JUNE SO THAT IT CAN
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ASSIST GOG IN REVIEW OF BIDS WHICH ARE SCHEDULED TO BE

SUBMITTED BY END OF JUNE.

4. FRENCH POSITION (ALSO EXPRESSED TO ME HERE BY FRENCH AMBASSADOR) THAT OCTRA ALONE SHOULD REVIEW BIDS AND ALLOCATE CONTRACTS AND THAT ENGINEERING FIRM SHOULD ONLY THEN BE HIRED TO SUPERVISE WORK IN PATENTLY UNSOUND, EXCEPT FROM FRENCH VIEWPOINT. OCTRA IS HEADED BY FRENCHMAN AND ALMOST ENTIRELY STAFFED BY FRENCH. PRESIDENT BONGO AND HIS MINISTERS HAVE ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS MADE POINT TO ME THAT, IN VIEW OF IMPORTANCE OF RAILROAD AND INTERNATIONAL CHARACTER OF ITS FINANCING, THEY DO NOT WISH TO BE SUBJECT TO CRITICISM THAT DECISIONS REGARDING RAILROAD FAVORED ONE DONOR OVER ANOTHER. THIS IS ONE OF THEIR MAJOR REASONS FOR WANTING TO ENGAGE SERVICES OF MULTINATIONAL ENGINEERING CONSORTIUM. GOG MINISTERS HAVE ALL ALSO AGREED WITH ME THAT REVIEW OF BIDS WILL BE EXTREMELY COMPLEX JOB AND THAT OCTRA COULD CERTAINLY BENEFIT FROM ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE OF ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM IN THIS CRUCIAL TASK.

5. TIME FOR DECISION ON ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM IS NOW NOT DECEMBER WHEN ALL DECISIONS ON ALLOCATION OF BIDS WILL HAVE BEEN MADE. GOG HAS SO FAR COMPLETELY CONCURRED WITH EMBASSY IN THIS REGARD. WHETHER FRENCH CAN STILL BY SOME MEANS OR OTHER MANAGE TO DELAY DECISION REMAINS TO BE SEEN. BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT IT IMPORTANT FOR U.S. TO HAVE A CONSORTIUM INCLUDING EITHER TAMS OR LOUIS BERGER INVOLVED IN STUDYING BIDS WHEN RECEIVED. AS A DONOR NATION, WE HAVE RIGHT TO PRESS OUR VIEWS WITH GOG AND FED AND I BELIEVE WE SHOULD ALSO TRY TO ELICIT SUPPORT OF ITALIANS, GERMANS AND CANADIANS WHO ALSO STAND TO GAIN BY SUCH MOVE.

6. FINAL DECISION ON BIDS WILL, OF COURSE, BE MADE BY GOG WHICH WILL RECEIVE ADVICE OF OCTRA IN ANY CASE. ALL CONTRACTS WILL NOT NECESSARILY GO TO LOWEST BIDDER INASMUCH AS COMPLICATED TIED FINANCING WILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. BELIEVE IT IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, THAT GOG RECEIVE UNBIASED TECHNICAL ADVICE FROM MULTINATIONAL CONSORTIUM WITH WORLDWIDE EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN BE CONFIDENTIAL

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DEPENDENT SOLELY ON FRENCH ADVICE FOR ALLOCATION OF CONTRACTS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ENGINEERING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS), RAILROADS, CONSULTANTS, CONTRACTS, PROPOSALS (BID)
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 MAY 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974LIBREV00611
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740127-0989
From: LIBREVILLE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740527/aaaaaxue.tel
Line Count: 110
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: (A) LIBREVILLE 0588 (BEING REPEATED, BRUSSELS);
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <02 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <12 JUN 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TRANSGABON RAILROAD: CHOICE OF ENGINEERING CON- SULTING FIRM
TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, US, FR, TRANSGABON RAILROAD, (BERGER, LOUIS)
To: STATE EC BRUSSELS
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005